

Virginia Henderson's **Nursing Need Theory** centers on the idea of assisting individuals to reach a state of independence in meeting their fundamental health needs 1, 2.

Historical Background

- **Origins:** Born in 1897, Henderson's early exposure to nursing occurred during **World War I** 3. While training at the Army School of Nursing, she began questioning the "regimented nature" of patient care and nursing's subservient role to medicine 3.
- **Education:** She earned her Baccalaureate (1932) and Master's (1934) degrees from **Teachers College, Columbia University**, where she later served as a faculty member for twenty years 4.
- **Influences:** She was deeply influenced by Annie W. Goodrich, who emphasized the **ethical significance** of nursing, and by student experiences that prioritized building relationships with patients over performing repetitive tasks 5.
- **Legacy:** A staunch advocate for nursing literature, the **Virginia Henderson International Nursing Library** was named in her honor by Sigma Theta Tau International in 1990 6.

Core Principles of the Nursing Need Theory

The theory is built on the premise that nurses should care for patients until they regain **self-sufficiency** 7. Key assumptions include:

1. **The Nurse's Role:** Nurses act on behalf of those who lack the physical strength, knowledge, or will to act for themselves 7. Henderson described this as "getting inside the skin" of each patient to understand their needs empathetically 8.
2. **Nurse-Patient Relationship Levels:**
3. **Substitute:** Acting as an advocate for the patient 8.
4. **Helper:** Assisting the patient in regaining independence 8.
5. **Partner:** Collaborating with the patient to achieve health goals 8.

Henderson's 14 Basic Needs

These 14 activities form the foundation of nursing care and serve as a framework for assessing patient health 8, 9:

1. **Breathe** normally 9.
2. **Eat and drink** adequately 9.
3. **Eliminate** body wastes 9.
4. **Move** and maintain desirable postures 9.
5. **Sleep** and rest 9.
6. Select suitable **clothing**; dress and undress 9.
7. Maintain **body temperature** by adjusting clothing and the environment 9.
8. Keep the body **clean** and protect the skin 9.
9. **Avoid dangers** in the environment and avoid injuring others 9.
10. **Communicate** emotions, needs, fears, or opinions 9.
11. **Worship** according to one's faith 9.

12. **Work** to achieve a sense of accomplishment 9.
13. Participate in **recreation** 9.
14. **Learn and discover** to satisfy curiosity and promote normal development 9.

Major Theoretical Concepts

- **Man (The Patient):** An entity seeking independence and well-being, where the mind and body are viewed as inseparable and interconnected 1.
- **Health:** Defined as a state of **equilibrium** and the ability to perform the 14 basic needs unassisted 10. Maintaining health is a challenge influenced by age, culture, and emotional balance 10.
- **Environment:** A nurturing setting that is conducive to health 11. Henderson believed both private and public health sectors share the responsibility of preserving individual well-being 11.

Applications in Nursing

- **Education:** Henderson's theory encourages a shift toward **holistic, patient-centered** training and evidence-based practices 12.
- **Research:** She advocated for **clinical research** focused on patient care rather than the nursing profession itself, noting that each of the 14 needs can serve as a foundation for scientific study 13.